

## **Transcription: Peter Schloss**

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*This is Hadassah Schloss. Today is November 11, 2013. It is forty minutes to four o'clock in the afternoon and I am interviewing Peter Gordon Schloss for the Voices of Veterans Program. Where were you born, Mr. Schloss?*

**Peter Schloss:** Los Angeles, California.

*And when?*

**Peter Schloss:** October the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

*What are your parents' names?*

**Peter Schloss:** Muriel and Lou Schloss.

*How long did you live in the city of your birth?*

**Peter Schloss:** From birth until age 17.

*What did you do when you were 17 years old?*

**Peter Schloss:** I went to take a trip to the country of Israel and ended up staying for eight years.

*You ended up staying for eight years. How did that happen?*

**Peter Schloss:** By the Israeli Law of Return of 1950, any Jew asking to stay there is automatically granted citizenship unless they expressly sign something saying they do not want it. I wanted to stay so I was in effect declared a citizen.

*But this was during the Vietnam War. Didn't you think that you would be called for the Vietnam War?*

**Peter Schloss:** I had registered for the draft. My number was not called in the lottery. Each year I kept applying at the U.S. Consulate in Tel Aviv. The number was never called so it never came into conflict.

*So you stayed in Israel eight years. What did you do there?*

**Peter Schloss:** The first few years I lived on a kibbutz, a communal farm. I studied at a college in Jerusalem and I ended up joining the Israeli military from 1971 'til very late 1974.

*How did that happen?*

**Peter Schloss:** Well, I was not going to be drafted there as all Israelis are but, by that point, I knew I wanted to stay there and become a citizen. I had made good friends with a bunch of high school kids and I volunteered for the army with them.

*So you volunteered for the Israeli Army. Where did you serve?*

**Peter Schloss:** I served basic training near a city called Hadera on the coast, the central coast. After that, we went to the Jordan Valley, and after that to the Golan Heights in the north.

*So how long is the Israeli service?*

**Peter Schloss:** The Israeli service is generally for the guys three years, depending on rank and job type.

*What was your job?*

**Peter Schloss:** I was a member of an artillery unit. My specific job was to screw the warheads into the bombs before they were shot and set timers as needed.

*So if you were in the Israeli service until '74, where were you when the Yom Kippur War in 1973 started?*

**Peter Schloss:** We were in a small artillery base in the Golan Heights about five miles southeast of Kunatra. Southwest.

*Were you still serving active or were you now in the reserves? How does that work?*

**Peter Schloss:** This was still a part of my active service because I was demobilized in late '74. We were in the base and the war broke out.

*And what did you do?*

**Peter Schloss:** Well, for a split second, panicked. After that, the unit had to withdraw because the Syrians outnumbered us seriously. And the work continued.

*Where did you go after you left that base?*

**Peter Schloss:** We withdrew toward the Israeli border itself. When we came within a couple of miles of it, the reserves from the army had been called up. We gained the upper hand and we ended up the war about 15 miles away from Damascus.

*Tell us a little about what does it feel to be in the middle of a war that you never thought you would be? And what does it feel like when people are shooting at you?*

**Peter Schloss:** Well, the answer in both cases it scares the heck out of you but I'm the child of a father who lived in Nazi Germany for several years where being a Jew was considered a crime. Israel was now our country and I was going to do my darndest to make sure it stayed that way. A place where we'd be welcomed.

*You say "our country." That means because you're Jewish, you can go to Israel whenever you want. Do you consider yourself an Israeli or an American?*

**Peter Schloss:** I consider myself a citizen of both countries. I have at one time or another voted in both countries. I have served in both militaries according to the laws of each country. That makes you a citizen.

*So tell us a little about the war itself. I was asking for you to tell me something about the war. Like what did it mean for you as an American Jew? What did it mean for you as an Israeli? Did you, at any point, fear for your life? Did you lose friends?*

**Peter Schloss:** Well, in the two weeks leading up to the war we had been briefed each night that there were so many batteries of six barrels per battery being built up by the Syrian Army, and we were wondering, you know, what's going on here? It looked like something to us was going on but the government was not reacting so we figured, okay, maybe we were wrong. In the afternoon of Yom Kippur when we had already been fasting for 20 hours out of the usual 24, my sergeant and I went up to check out the situation. We noticed a plane coming in from the Israeli side of the line. So we stood there waving at it. We noticed that on either side of us there were spurts of sand like somebody was throwing rocks at us. We're standing, getting ready to turn around and cuss out our friends when we noticed that the plane had a motor in a place where it shouldn't be. A Syrian MIG was shooting at us. We realized the war was on. We got into our bunkers. A bombardment started. We received word we had to leave because an overwhelming amount of Syrian tanks were coming toward us and we were the only battery between the Israeli lines and Israel. We had to preserve the unit. Overhead we noticed a plane. It had been rumored during the war that if a certain line was crossed by the Syrian battery the plane would drop bombs in the area, possible nuclear, and fearing for our lives was definite. We managed to outrun them. Hold off until friendly forces came and then took the offensive.

*I understand you still have a flag from that time?*

**Peter Schloss:** Right before we left our base, when it went into the base, there were Syrian commandos starting to come into the base, I realized that our flag was still standing from the flagpole, and it just seemed to me to be a big insult that our flag be captured. So I went out and grabbed the flag. Still have it.

*The war started on October 6<sup>th</sup> and your birthday is October 30<sup>th</sup>. I understand there is something to do with a cake that traveled from the U.S. to you?*

**Peter Schloss:** Our family has a tradition for something around a hundred plus years where a specific cake is made for every birthday. It had gotten to my father during the Normandy Invasion. I assumed it would not happen for me. But sure enough on the day of my birthday comes this tin. And here's the specific cake. In a battery of some 50 people with 12 men in our particular gun, we didn't bother slicing the cake. We just reached in and grabbed it. The cake that probably had taken my mother a couple of hours to make lasted about 30 seconds.

*I understand you also served after the war in the reserves, the Israeli Reserves. How does that work?*

**Peter Schloss:** The Israeli Army, again depending on your job and rank, you serve a minimum of 60 days active duty per year until you are either 56 years old or leave the country. So you are called into a unit with the same people you served in during the regular service. This will include both men and women.

*You met your wife in Israel, I'm told. That was kind of an interesting situation. Tell us about that.*

**Peter Schloss:** I had been told by my commander . . . This was pretty close to the time I was about to leave the service. That there was a civilian settlement under fire by terrorists from Lebanon. We needed to go and help them. At the time my unit was based in the city of Nazareth. We came to the community. We had never been there before. "You go here, you go there." I started running toward a sound which to me sounded like grenades. Not knowing where I was

going I walked right next to a shelter that hid the settlement children. A guard, I knew it was female, I had no other details at the time, ordered me, "Freeze or you're dead." I froze. I identified myself. I was allowed to pass. The next morning a girl came up to me, we started to talk. I soon realized that this was the guard that had nearly shot me the night before. Been married about 38 years now. In this case I believe that love at first sight refers to gun sight.

*So when you came to the United States you volunteered for the Army that didn't call you during the Vietnam time. What branch did you go in the Army, what branch of that service did you go in, and what did you do during that time? How long were you in the American Army?*

**Peter Schloss:** I was in the Army from July of '77 'til August of '88. I had left Israel due to citizenship requirements demanded by the U.S. I had no real job training whatsoever, so the military seemed to be a way of getting job training, plus supporting by then a wife with a child soon to be on the way. I had known the Army before so I volunteered for the Army here. I was originally trained as a field medic but did advance training as a military optician. That sent us to San Antonio then to New Jersey, and for advanced training, to Denver, Colorado.

*Where else did you serve in the American Army?*

**Peter Schloss:** After Denver, Colorado, I served 13 months in Korea with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. There I worked both as a medic and as an optician. From there I was transferred to Fort Hood, Texas, where I was mostly utilized as a medic although sometimes did optician work. And in '88 I left the military.

*What do you feel about having served in two armies? How do you feel about military service? Do you think it would be a good idea if everybody had to do some type of service to the country, whether military or some other type of service before they get on with their lives?*

**Peter Schloss:** I do feel that military does teach you certain values. Being on time, being dependable for whatever your job is. Basically being dependable, being on time, adhering to certain conditions like dress or way you act. I would not object to seeing some sort of mandatory national service, possibly with the idea of what President JFK had with the Peace Corps. Possibly that could be substitute for those so inclined. I sometimes feel a bit odd at having served in two militaries but I don't regret any of it.

*Is there anything else that you'd like to add?*

**Peter Schloss:** I think in some manner, not completely, having served is one of the prouder moments of my life. I mean, I did not, by any stretch of the imagination, have an important job, but I feel I contributed to the safety of both countries.

*And on this day, most special, Veterans Day, I want to thank you for your service. Not only to the American Army but to the Israeli Army, and for being an all-around good egg.*

**Peter Schloss:** Well, thanks. In a way, I feel I owed it to the U.S. It gave my family a new start in '38. It's a way of paying it back a little.

*Thank you.*